

Mrs. X, say Mrs. Z, "Have you heard the latest news?"

Mrs. Z—"Why, what is it, dear?"

Mrs. X—"The Live Oak Brokerage & Commission Co. have on the road expecting it every day, 1,100 sacks of the Famous Snow Flake Flour, made in Nebraska!"

Mrs. Z—"I am so glad! Now, we can have good Biscuits and Bread again."

Mrs. X—"Me too, dear, their add will show the day it arrives and my Grocer will sure have to send me up a sack. A little high in price, but—"

While They Waited

By Virginia Lolla Woods

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He jumped out of the little country rig, leaving it in the hands of a frolicful boy, and rushed up to the ticket office just as his train was pulling out from the station.

"Phaw!" he exclaimed trantly, and then to the sleepy looking, contented ticket agent, "When does the next train leave for New York?"

"Two hours," replied that individual laconically.

Maverick Oliver wasn't a man to cry over spilled milk. He sat himself philosophically down in a shady recess of the waiting room and extracted a notebook. He would look over some memoranda he had jotted down for his editorial article for the Review and then take a stroll along the country hedges. There seemed to be a rather attractive bit of woodland just beyond.

"How long must I wait for connections for Knoxville?"

Something in the woman's voice, half contrite, half all, made the man with the notebook suddenly start. He'd been so engrossed in reading his memoranda that he had scarcely noticed the incoming train, with all its attendant bustle. Now, however, a single woman's voice made him start and opened the Review article to be as far from his thoughts as the military affairs of nations B. C.

The woman's back was turned to Maverick Oliver, but he knew it was Eleanor. Who else in all the world had that quavering voice, that soft slope of shoulder, that bewitching mass of curled chestnut hair?

"The Knoxville?" came the ticket agent's conventional voice as he raised his wrinkled forehead with the back of his hand. "A half hour, sir/m. Train's sixteen minutes late." The woman turned impatiently away from the window.

It was then they came face to face.

"You!" cried Oliver, springing up. He stood there in the barren waiting room, fling its emptiness with the richness of her charms. To the man's hungry eyes she was food of the most satisfying as well as of the most delicate sort.

She did not hold out her hand. Nevertheless she encountered him not in her old-fashioned fashion, but with a smile including him in some mood too large to be wholly personal.

"How long have you changed, Eleanor?" he cried involuntarily.

"Are you, too, waiting for a train?" she answered softly in return. "In which direction do you go?"

"South—in New York," said Oliver. "And you?"

"To Knoxville, fourteen miles east."

Oliver took her umbrella and they set out from her, and then they walked slowly up and down the platform together, man and woman, instead of husband and wife, held apart by some strange fat they had both accepted.

In the fields, all around, the buttercups were golden and the wild carrot was in white, lavelike flower. Over in the woods beyond some song birds, waking from their summer slumps, were beginning to warble. A group of traveling men was lounging on the railing at the far end of the platform, expectorating copiously to punctuate the points in their stories.

Oliver dusted the platform steps at the other end of the walk with his handkerchief, and the woman sat anxiously down, her delicate profile outlined against the clear blue of the sky like some exquisite cameo. She had always been beautiful, though. It wasn't that which made the man exclaim again involuntarily.

"You've changed so, Eleanor!" It was true. It was no mere fancy of his imaginative writer's eye that discovered new meanings in the face before him. It had undergone a vague but very genuine transformation.

"Changed?" repeated she, with a curious tenderness. "I've tried to change—that, do you understand? Since last winter, when we agreed to separate, I've been trying—so hard, Maverick—to take control of my own stunted nature, turn it where it wants."

"Just" broke in Oliver, with a bitter keenness, "we were both to blame—both, do you hear? And I'm afraid you've been cleverer than I if you've succeeded things where they failed to fit the pattern. I've not changed much, I'm afraid."

Under her black lashes the woman smiled at him with a reverence he might have translated had he been high placed; as some loyal acquiescence in his former state. What Oliver felt now, however, was curiosity in his young wife, not in himself. So—

"Tell me," he burst forth, "what has changed you so?"

She rolled up her shawl little handkerchief into a string and, throwing it over her knee, pulled it unconsciously by both ends, gazing steadfastly into the blue distance above Oliver's head.

"I don't know whether I ought to tell you," she began.

Oliver recalled that delicious little habit she used to have of tempting the fate shyly, of hesitating when she meant to be right down outrageous.

"Of course you ought," he urged. "You always do in the end, you know, and it will save time." Under her playfulness he had allowed himself to grow light hearted.

"Well, then"—she began, but her voice trailed off vaguely. Her cheeks took on a pinker bloom; she forgot the handkerchief and finished her thought with a mature dignity that became her like the armor of her sex.

"Our little boy, Maverick—our little boy has changed me."

"Ah! Our boy?"—Oliver broke off abruptly, for something had suddenly clutched him by the throat.

The woman hastily brushed her tears away and went on practically:

"You'd be proud of him, Maverick—such strong, agile limbs—and he has the will of a little savage."

"Let me see," Oliver said brusquely, stooping over the platform's edge and picking a lettercup stalk that had accidentally grown up from the gravel. "He must be eleven months now."

"Yes. He was five when—when you last saw him." She kept her eyes deliberately fixed upon the high railroad trestles in the blue distance. "Do you know, he's been such a help to me, I've told him all the things I wanted to tell you—told him that his mother had been a vain, silly, girlish tyrant who, coming straight from the convent, wanted to have everything this world had to give—money, fame, position—all those things that are bought in the market place—and had wanted to buy them with his father's conscience."

Over the trestles the smoke of the incoming train was seen. There were the usual bustle and running to and fro on the platform, setting of hand bags, carting of trunks, and so on. Whatever swift, natural, and revealing Oliver and his wife had been on the point of making dissolved into nothingness, jared by the prosaic commotion of traffic. It was a pity, too, for with Eleanor's last words her face had melted into a pensive sweetness, her exquisite mouth had taken on sudden quivering little curves, she had seemed about to say, "Ambition, selfishness, the cruelty of pride—all those things have gone, Maverick."

She didn't say that, however. Instead she rose from the wooden step which her husband had dusted for her. "I'm glad you found me changed," she said wearily. "Something in the man's honest soul overflooded."

"I, too—I, too, Eleanor, will change!" cried he.

"Ah, you've no need to," answered she, meeting honesty with honesty. "You've been growing like the trees you're in"—she nodded in the direction of the woodland—"for years, straight and strong. I had to be pruned. I had—"

The train's screeching whistle drowned her words. It came rushing in and stopped. Oliver still held Eleanor's tiny suit case and umbrella in his hand. There was a confused sound of greeting to the passengers who had alighted and the clamor of hotel runners and bus drivers.

"Now, then, step lively!" cried the brakeman as the last much bundled old woman descended, allowing the impatient traveling men to climb aboard. Oliver and his wife were the last of the crowd.

He helped her aboard, found her chair for her in the parlor car, then turned miserably to meet her eyes.

"All aboard!" came the strident voice of the conductor. The train began to move almost imperceptibly.

"Goodby!" cried Oliver, battling with strong emotion, but conscious of the increasing movement of the train.

Thus as he bent over her seat the woman laid a trembling hand on his arm, and her eyes were brimming with slow tears.

"Goodby, Maverick? Don't you want to go with me to our baby?"

"Good heavens! Eleanor, do I want to?"

Some lonely passengers at the other end of the car wondered what had suddenly illumined the man's handsome face with that electric thrill of joy. Then the telegraph poles began to wobble by. Oliver had forgotten New York.

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